

THE AMERICAN VETERAN
EPISODE 4, PART 2

THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO ENHANCE THE CARE WE PROVIDE VETERANS. SOON, BLIND VETERANS WILL NOTICE A BIG IMPROVEMENT AT THE HINES V.A. HOSPITAL NEAR CHICAGO. DANIELLE MCDAVIT HAS MORE ON HOW V.A.'S BLIND REHABILITATION PROGRAM IS EVOLVING AND GROWING RIGHT INTO A NEW BUILDING.

MCDAVIT: RICKY YOUNG, LEGALLY BLIND FOR FIVE YEARS, NOTHING - INCLUDING GLAUCOMA - STOPPED THIS ARMY VETERAN FROM PURSUING HIS DREAM. YOUNG LEARNED HOW TO USE A MEASURING TAPE HE CAN FEEL BUT NOT SEE.

THERAPIST, HANDING MEASURING TAPE TO YOUNG: TELL ME IF YOU FEEL ANYTHING ON THERE.

RICKY YOUNG, FEELING TAPE WITH HIS HANDS: YES, IT'S LIKE A HOLE HERE. AND SMOOTH. THERE'S AN INDENTATION, MAYBE AT THE SIX-INCH MARK.

MCDAVIT: EVENTUALLY YOUNG HOPES THE SKILLS HE LEARNS AT V.A.'S BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER IN HINES, ILLINOIS WILL HELP HIM GO TO COLLEGE.

JERRY SCHUTTER, CHIEF, BLIND REHABILITATION SERVICE: WHAT WE'RE DOING IS OFFERING A TRAINING IN A SCHOOL-LIKE SETTING. SEVEN CLASSES A DAY, FIVE DAYS A WEEK. ANY VETERAN THAT IS LEGALLY BLIND AND HAS BEEN DISCHARGED HONORABLY FROM THE SERVICE CAN COME TO OUR PROGRAM.

MCDAVIT: BLIND REHABILITATION SPECIALISTS SHOW VETERANS HOW TO COPE AND LEARN HOW TO DO PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING THEY USED TO DO BEFORE THEIR VISION LOSS. THEY TAKE APART STUFF AND PUT IT BACK TOGETHER, WHETHER IT IS A FAUCET OR A CARBURETOR. ORGANIZATION IS KEY.

THERAPIST: I NOTICE YOU'RE STARTING TO GET A GOOD OLD PILE OF TOOLS THERE ON THE COUNTERTOP.

VETERAN: YEAH.

THERAPIST: YOU WANT TO PUT SOME OF THOSE AWAY SO THAT IT DOESN'T GET CONFUSING.

MCDAVIT, HOLDING A PORTABLE KEYBOARD IN ONE HAND AND AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE IN THE OTHER): VETERANS ALSO BENEFIT FROM

ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY. FOR EXAMPLE, THIS IS A BRAILLE NOTE. IT IS BASICALLY A HANDHELD COMPUTER FOR THE BLIND. YOU CAN CHECK YOUR E-MAIL. IT HAS A WORD PROCESSOR. AND THIS IS A G.P.S. OR GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM FOR THE BLIND. IT'S CALLED A "TREKKER." IT TALKS TO YOU, SO IF YOU'RE WALKING DOWN THE STREET, IT WILL TELL YOU WHAT INTERSECTION YOU'RE APPROACHING.

THEN THERE IS A SPECIAL LEVEL THAT BEEPS TO LET RICKY YOUNG KNOW THIS PICTURE IS STRAIGHT. THERE IS ALSO A LOW-VISION CLASSROOM WHERE VETERAN ELDON MATTSON LEARNS HOW TO MAGNIFY BILLS AND EVEN SIGN CHECKS. AND THERE'S THE TALKING COMPUTER.

CLOVIS STORIE, BLIND VETERAN: I'VE LEARNED HOW TO TURN THE COMPUTER ON, FIRST OFF. AND THEN HOW TO GET ON THE INTERNET. HOW TO STORE FOLDERS, SAVE DOCUMENTS, CHECK MY E-MAIL AND READ THE NEWSPAPER FROM WHERE I'M FROM. IT OPENS UP A NEW WORLD.

MCDAVIT: VETERANS LIVE AT THE BLIND CENTER FOUR WEEKS WHILE THEY ADVANCE THEIR SKILLS.

SCHUTTER: THE OLD BLIND CENTER HAD SMALL ROOMS, HAD COMMUNAL BATHROOMS, NO PRIVACY FOR THE VETERANS. NO ACCESS TO THE CORRIDORS.

MCDAVIT: SO, OUT WITH THE OLD AND IN WITH THE NEW. JERRY SCHUTTER, DIRECTOR OF THE BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER, SHOWS US A PREVIEW OF THE SOON-TO-BE-OPEN STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY.

SCHUTTER: EVERYTHING IS BIGGER. EVERYTHING IS BETTER.

MCDAVIT: BATHROOMS FROM COMMUNAL TO PRIVATE; HALLWAYS FROM CRAMPED TO WIDE ENOUGH TO FIT THREE WHEELCHAIRS ABREAST; THE GROUNDS, FROM A SIMPLE SIDEWALK TO A PRIVATE COURTYARD.

SCHUTTER: THIS IS THE DINING AREA THAT IS GOING TO ALLOW US TO HAVE ALL THE VETERANS SIT TOGETHER AT THE SAME TIME. BEFORE WE HAD SIX FLOORS AND TWO BUILDINGS. NOW WE HAVE TWO FLOORS AND ONE BUILDING.

JACK HETRICK, DIRECTOR, HINES VA HOSPITAL: HINES HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY OF SERVICING BLINDED VETERANS. AND ONE OF THE CENTERS -- ACTUALLY THE FIRST IN THE COUNTRY, IN THE V.A. SYSTEM TO HAVE A BLIND CENTER. THIS IS A FANTASTIC EDITION TO OUR HOSPITAL.

RICKY YOUNG, BLIND VETERAN: GETTING OVER THERE IS A STEP UP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

ANYTHING THEY CAN DO TO IMPROVE FOR VETERANS, I'M ALL FOR IT.

RICHARD MANNING, BLIND VETERAN: I THINK IT IS GOING TO BE GREAT. IT IS MUCH MORE ROOMY. THE LIVING FACILITIES FOR THE VETERANS THAT WILL BE THERE IS MUCH BETTER.

MCDAVIT: JUST LIKE THE PROGRAM ITSELF MAKES LIVES BETTER FOR BLIND VETERANS, GIVING THEM MUCH-NEEDED CONFIDENCE.

BENSON: V.A. OPERATES TEN BLIND REHABILITATION PROGRAMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. TO FIND ONE NEAR YOU, CALL 1-800-827-1000.

BENSON: WOMEN'S VETERANS ARE ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING SEGMENTS OF THE VETERAN POPULATION. THERE ARE 1.7 MILLION FEMALE VETERANS. THE PROBLEM IS, MANY OF THEM DON'T EVEN KNOW THEY ARE ELIGIBLE FOR V.A. BENEFITS. NINA EDWARDS REPORTS.

EDWARDS: JAMIE NEWBY, A NAVY VETERAN IN HER TWENTYS IS HAPPY TO HAVE V.A. HEALTH CARE COVERAGE.

JAMIE NEWBY, NAVY VETERAN: I'M A STUDENT. AND MY INCOME LENDS ITSELF TO ME BEING ABLE TO USE THE FACILITY AT NO COST TO ME. WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT I NEED RIGHT NOW.

EDWARDS: V.A. HEALTH CARE HAS COME A LONG WAY FROM THE DAYS WHEN ARDATH BIERLEIN WAS A MARINE IN THE 1940s. SHE LEFT THE MILITARY AFTER THE WAR ENDED.

ARDATH BIERLEIN, MARINE CORPS VETERAN: I DIDN'T THINK OF THE V.A. AS A BENEFIT UNTIL YEARS LATER. I HAD HEALTH INSURANCE LIKE EVERYBODY DID, BUT IT STARTED GOING UP IN COST, PARTICULARLY MEDICATION. BUT I THOUGHT, WELL, I WONDER IF I COULDN'T GET THAT FROM THE V.A.

EDWARDS: SHE COULD AND DID. BUT, YOUNG AND OLD, TOO MANY WOMEN ARE UNAWARE OF THEIR VETERAN STATUS. V.A. IS TRYING TO CHANGE THAT.

IRENE TROWELL-HARRIS, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS: MANY WOMEN DON'T REALIZE THEY ARE VETERANS BECAUSE THEY HAVE EITHER HEARD ABOUT THE MYTHS OR THEY SIMPLY DON'T BELIEVE THEY ARE A VETERAN UNLESS THEY HAVE SERVED IN COMBAT. AND THAT'S NOT TRUE.

CAROLE TURNER, DIRECTOR, WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH PROGRAM: WE

NOW PROVIDE MATERNITY AND INFERTILITY SERVICES TO WOMEN. WE ALSO PROVIDE BREAST AND CANCER, NOT ONLY SCREENING, BUT SERVICES ONCE THERE IS A PROBLEM IDENTIFIED. WE ARE VERY ADVANCED IN THAT PARTICULAR AREA. AND WE ALSO HAVE A WHOLE HOST OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND PROGRAMS THAT ARE VERY, VERY SPECIFIC TO THE NEEDS OF WOMEN.

EDWARDS: MANY V.A. MEDICAL FACILITIES NOW HAVE A WOMAN VETERANS PROGRAM MANAGER, LIKE NURSE PRACTITIONER ANN THRAILKILL.

ANN THRAILKILL: I'M SOMEBODY THEY CAN REACH AT ALL TIMES. I'M MORE OR LESS THE ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN VETERANS IN OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM. I'M THE PERSON THEY CAN CALL AND HOPEFULLY GET AN ANSWER OR A REDIRECTION TO THEIR PROBLEM. THE PATIENTS, ONCE THEY COME HERE, THEY ARE JUST AMAZED AT THE QUALITY OF CARE AND THE TIME THAT IS SPENT WITH THEM.

TURNER: WE REALLY FEEL THAT A GROWING NUMBER OF WOMEN VETERANS REALLY DICTATES THAT EVERYONE IN THE FACILITY SHOULD HAVE THE SAME LEVEL OF SENSITIVITY AND COMPASSION THAT A PROGRAM MANAGER WOULD HAVE IN CARING FOR WOMEN.

EDWARDS: SO, V.A. IS TRAINING ITS EMPLOYEES, PREPARING THEM FOR THIS GROWING SEGMENT OF THE VETERAN POPULATION, STAYING ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF TECHNOLOGY, PARTNERING WITH LOCAL MEDICAL SCHOOLS, EVOLVING THE WOMEN'S HEALTH PROGRAM TO MEET THE NEEDS OF FUTURE FEMALE VETERANS.

TURNER: THERE'S A NEW BREED OF VETERANS THAT WE'RE SEEING COMING BACK FROM IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, PARTICULARLY WOMEN VETERANS, ARE NOW ACCESSING SERVICES FROM THE V.A. IN WAYS THAT WE'VE NOT REALLY SEEN IN THE PAST. WE'RE NOW SEEING WOMEN WHO ARE EITHER ON THE FRONT LINES OR VERY CLOSE TO COMBAT LINES THAT ARE COMING BACK WITH INCREASED INCIDENCES OF TRAUMATIC INJURIES, AMPUTEES.

EDWARDS: AS V.A.'S HEALTH CARE PLAN FOR WOMEN EVOLVES, THE WOMEN'S PROGRAM IN PALO ALTO PLANS TO EXPAND, WITH AN ENTIRE WING DEDICATED TO FEMALE VETERANS.

SAMINA IQBAL, MD, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM: I THINK IN THE FUTURE THEY WILL NOTICE A GREAT DEAL OF ENHANCEMENT IN THE SERVICES THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE THEM.

EDWARDS: BUT THERE'S NO NEED TO WAIT FOR THE FUTURE. YOU CAN FIND YOUR V.A. BENEFITS TODAY.

JAMIE NEWBY: I WOULD JUST ENCOURAGE FEMALE VETERANS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FACILITIES AND THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM. THERE ARE A TON OF OPTIONS. JUST TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM.

BENSON: FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BENEFITS FOR WOMEN VETERANS, CALL 1-800-827-1000. OR LOG ON TO VA.GOV AND CLICK ON THE WOMEN VETERANS TAB ON THE LEFT-HAND COLUMN. WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK WITH MORE OF "THE AMERICAN VETERAN."